



## **FORT SAM HOUSTON LEGAL ASSISTANCE OFFICE** **ADVANCED MEDICAL DIRECTIVES**

### **Advanced Directive to Physicians**

Sometimes called a "living will," an Advanced Directive to Physicians (ADP) spells out what medical procedures you want taken if you become too ill to speak for yourself. In an ADP, you specify in advance what types of treatments or procedures you would accept or reject, and when these instructions are to apply.

An ADP often, but does not always, deal with the decision whether to sustain life support in the event of terminal illness or an irreversible condition. An ADP can specify whether you wish life-saving or life-prolonging measures to be taken, or if you wish life-support to be withdrawn if, in your physician's opinion, your condition is irreversible or terminal. ADP's can also specify whether you desire palliative medicine to be employed. Palliative medicine is the administration of pain-relieving medication, including powerful narcotics and opiates, during a terminal illness to maximize patient comfort, but not necessarily to extend life.

An ADP can be as specific or general as you wish to make it. In its most general form, it can state merely whether you desire life-support to be continued in the event of illness or accident. In its most specific form, it can state what specific life-sustaining measures you approve or disapprove of, whether you desire the use of palliative medicine, or if you desire organ donation.

### **Health Care Power of Attorney**

Often an ADP by itself is incomplete. A Health Care Power of Attorney, sometimes called a Health Care Proxy, appoints another individual or individuals to make health care decisions for you regarding your care when you are unable to do so yourself. Unlike an ADP, a Health Care POA does not state specific directions for physicians to follow. Likewise, it does not deal only with end-of-life treatment or care. Instead, it appoints someone to act on your behalf, as your personal representative, to make health care decisions for you when you are unable to do so.

It is often helpful to have both an ADP and a Health Care POA. For example, if you are in a car accident and rendered unconscious, a Health Care POA would help your personal representative, whom you have appointed, make decisions on your behalf regarding certain treatments physicians may want to implement, but which you are unable to give consent to. However, if you slip into a coma, an ADP may direct whether you wish life-sustaining procedures to be implemented.

It is important to remember that an ADP and a Health Care Power of Attorney are two separate documents that serve two different purposes. They may stand alone, or work in conjunction with each other. If an ADP is not in existence, a personal representative appointed in a Health Care POA may

make end-of-life decisions on your behalf. However, a personal representative appointed in a Health Care POA cannot override the decisions you make in an ADP when both documents exist.

Make copies of your ADP and Health Care POA. Make sure they are given to your treating physician, and also to the personal representative you have appointed.